

K-9 teams train hard

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99th Security Forces Squadron has gone to the dogs or at least some of them have, literally. Military working dogs are stationed all over the world, just as military people are.

The military working dog section of the 99th SFS has eight MWD's assigned, with two presently deployed in Saudi Arabia and one in Arizona.

Military working dogs are considered equipment and requisitioned through the supply system. Trained at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, like most new recruits, the dogs are purchased from breeders who specialize in breeding German Shepherds, Dutch Shepherds and Malamois.

MWD's are usually stationed at age two and remain at the same base their entire career. The 99th SFS MWD's range in age three to six.

The dog handler's course, also held at Lackland, is approximately 15 weeks long. Dog units operate on a one handler-one dog system, so the handler will remain with one dog the entire time they're assigned to Nellis. However, dogs are taught to be tolerant of other handlers, since the dog will remain at the base when the handler changes duty stations, usually after one and a half to two years.

Then the dog will be assigned a new handler for approximately a 30 to 45 day acclimation period, during which the handler and dog go on walks and long rides to establish a rapport.

When the dogs deploy, the handlers are deployed with

Right, playing rough with Blackie, Staff Sgt. Ian Smith, 99th Security Forces Squadron, teaches him how to be social and how to be able to function around people and distractions without injuring innocent bystanders. But, working dogs are not pets. Over-familiarization with people can make them too friendly and less effective as a military working dog. It's up to handlers and trainers to make sure the fine line is maintained.



them. Most of the dog handlers are volunteers chosen directly from the SFS who return to security forces duties when their tour as a dog handler is over.

"The dogs are used for explosive and drug detection and for attacks," said Staff Sgt. Chad Trausch, NCO in charge of the military working dog section. "Tasks such as building and vehicle sweeps would take much longer to accomplish, and would be impossible in some situations without the dogs."

"All the dogs are trained to attack and to tolerate gunfire, but then they specialize in either explosive or drug detection," said Staff Sgt. Trausch. "They're not normally used for both. "The bomb dogs are the ones deployed most often."

The MWD's stationed at Nellis are Brick, Kahn, Kastor, Rinus, Roy, Danny, Blacky and Best. They have daily exercise and basic attack training routines established by their individual handlers and train approximately once per week using real drugs and explosives. Each MWD is recertified once a year and enters into a 30-day remedial training status if they don't pass recertification.

In addition to the rigorous training, the MWD's are kept under close scrutiny for their physical well being. Due to the physical demands of the MWD mission, the dogs undergo a complete physical examination that includes a teeth cleaning once per year and hip x-ray every two years.

"In doing our job we are responsible for the care of all involved, other cops, the innocent, the suspect and the dogs," said Sgt. Trausch. "We want everyone to go home safe."



Right, Senior Airman Jason Laidig, 99th Security Forces Squadron and his partner Best, check a truck for explosives during a training exercise. A K-9 team can spend as much as 120 days a year TDY supporting drug or bomb detection missions around the world. Below, Best shows his aggressive side. All security forces K-9s are trained in either drug or bomb detection, but each is also trained to protect its handler and to react to threats. Training such as this is an ongoing, lifetime process that involves as much hard work for the dog as it does for the handlers.

Photos by Senior Airman Melony Bobair

